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The Comprehensive Approach to Health Systems Management

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Overview

The Comprehensive Approach to Health Systems Management is a Maternal and Child Survival Program (MCSP)-developed process in which subnational managers—typically at the district level—leverage, mobilize, and coordinate local health system resources for increased coverage, utilization, quality, equity, and sustainability of health services.

It supports local decision-makers in identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing health system challenges that have hindered the achievement of strategic objectives, and allocating available or potential local resources for corrective actions.

Through a proactive joint planning process, the Comprehensive Approach brings together subnational stakeholders to take a holistic view of improving health outcomes with an efficient and effective system.

“USAID invests in HSS to promote country ownership and sustainability, scale up solutions, and promote greater efficiencies in investments.”

—USAID’s *Vision for Health Systems Strengthening* (2015)

Approach

The approach strengthens the capacity of subnational health system managers so that they take the lead to orchestrate holistic planning and implementation processes. This includes leveraging local resources and activities, drawing on national programs and policies, and tailoring them to serve local needs. Local health managers working under the approach identify gaps and bottlenecks in the delivery and uptake of reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health care; develop contextualized systems strategies to solve problems; and monitor and use available data to track progress and adjust plans. MCSP provides mentorship to subnational teams throughout the process, providing technical assistance in implementing action plans, mobilizing resources, and building local leadership and management capacities.

By bringing together subnational stakeholders from within the health system and from local administrative authorities, community leadership committees, implementing partners, and private-sector entities, the Comprehensive Approach allows district managers to break out of vertical programming processes and consider integrated systems approaches. This decentralized approach to planning and management contributes to the sustainability of interventions and empowers subnational managers to coordinate and lead local investments to optimize results.

Initially, MCSP guides and supports subnational teams through five steps of the Comprehensive Approach methodology, as illustrated on the following page, providing ongoing mentoring throughout the process. National and subnational stakeholders are involved throughout to promote the institutionalization of the Comprehensive Approach methodology into national planning and programming.

The Comprehensive Approach Methodology

Identification of health system challenges through activity review

What objectives or activities have not been achieved at the district level?
What health system challenges have prevented the district from achieving these objectives or implementing these activities?

Analysis and prioritization of health system challenges

What are the root causes of these health system challenges?
Which challenges or root causes are priorities at the subnational level within the local context?

Identification of local resources

What available and potential resources exist locally?
Resources in the four categories below can be leveraged to proactively address health system challenges:

<p>Community Engagement <i>Community health workers, women's groups, youth groups, radio broadcasts</i></p>	<p>Stakeholder and Sector Mobilization <i>Municipal social budget lines, traditional healers, private companies</i></p>
<p>Adaptation and Use of Management Tools <i>Supervision tools, job descriptions, planning guides, budget templates</i></p>	<p>Leveraging Existing Initiatives <i>Door-to-door outreach, vaccine days, supervision visits, regular coordination meetings</i></p>

Development of action plans with allocated resources

What corrective actions at the subnational level can help to address priority health system challenges and their root causes? What local resources can be mobilized for and allocated to these plans?

Mentored implementation

How can corrective action plans be implemented?

MCSP provides mentoring throughout this implementation phase to support districts in mobilizing additional resources and monitoring progress of action plans.

Implementation Experience

Tanzania: The Comprehensive Approach was piloted in the Mara and Kagera regions of Tanzania (under the local name Mbinu Timilifu kwa Usimamizi wa Mifumo ya Afya [MTUMA]) from April to December 2016. The objective of the pilot was to generate lessons learned and process improvements for future applications of the Comprehensive Approach in Tanzania and other countries. In a qualitative assessment of MTUMA, subnational managers generally agreed that MTUMA strengthened local accountability, motivated individual performance in planning and management, and strengthened capacity to identify and mobilize resources for efficient delivery of services. However, because implementation was limited to nine months due to early project closeout, there were insufficient time and resources (human, financial, and physical) to fully implement district council-level plans developed through MTUMA. Lack of alignment between MTUMA and national standards for the Comprehensive Council Health Plans also limited implementation of district action plans. While some individuals—and possibly district councils—stated that they may use components of the Comprehensive Approach in future work, subnational planning processes have not systematically incorporated it. MTUMA showed that human capacity and stakeholder buy-in at various levels (facility, district council, and regional) and across technical functions are essential for sustaining integrated, strategic planning practices.

Guinea: The application of the Comprehensive Approach in Guinea is providing ongoing technical support to district teams so that they can develop and implement integrated work plans that address local health system challenges in a holistic and proactive manner. At the end of the workshops, each district team identified health system problems that prevented it from achieving its objectives, conducted a root-cause analysis of one priority health system problem, developed a list of local resources (both potential and available) that could contribute to its objectives, and identified corrective actions with allocated resources to address each root cause. Participating districts will incorporate these corrective actions into their upcoming district work plans—a process facilitated by the Ministry of Health—and will apply this methodology to the analysis of other health system problems prior to work planning workshops. Participants remained engaged throughout the workshops in plenary discussions and group work sessions. In each region, there was also significant interest in adopting and using the Comprehensive Approach in future local planning activities. The Regional Director in Conakry stated, “We are going to do it ourselves. We are not going to align with the partners. The partners will align and respond to our needs.” The Ministry of Health partners also noted their interest in scaling up the incorporation of the Comprehensive Approach for Health Systems Management into their annual work planning process to ensure that annual work plans are locally driven and address priority challenges.